

The Saskatchewan Bill

How not to do it again exemplified in the Direct Legislation Act of the Saskatchewan Legislature

The Next Move is the People's—What Shall it be?

By Seymour J. Farmer

Just previous to the battle of ballots in the province of Saskatchewan last July, both political parties took the same step. Or rather, not to do them any injustice, both announced their intention of taking that step, which in politics is not always the same thing.

Both parties added to their already over-distended piecrusts of promises, a pledge to enact a law providing for the Initiative and Referendum. There are a tolerable number of voters who are rather strong on the Initiative and Referendum. As I said, it was just before the election.

Somewhat unexpectedly—though it was shrewd politics—a bill for the Initiative and Referendum was introduced in the first session of the new legislature—the session just terminated.

Direct Legislation Leagues' Proposals

As a method of gauging the merits of the government bill, compare its chief provisions with those of the bill advocated by the Direct Legislation League.

1. Initiative petitions to be signed by not less than eight per cent. and Referendum petitions by not less than five per cent. in number of the votes polled at the preceding general election. Same in both bills and thoroughly satisfactory.

2. No act of the legislature to go into effect until the ninetieth day after the close of the session at which it was passed. This is to allow time for the filing of Referendum petitions, and is the same in both bills. So far, good.

3. Emergency measures. In the League's bill exception is allowed to the foregoing provision for cases of emergency. Such acts may go into effect at once if a two-thirds majority of the legislature declare their immediate enactment to be necessary for the public peace, health or safety, but they are still subject to Referendum. Franchises, renewals of franchises, subsidies and bond guarantees are expressly excluded from the emergency clause.

In the government bill, any act in which a contrary intention is declared, and which is passed by a two-thirds majority, may go into effect at once, and is not then subject to the Referendum. Neither franchises, subsidies nor any other measure is excluded. It will at once be seen that while the League's bill makes due provision for genuine cases of emergency, and those only, by the elastic provisions of the government bill a two-thirds majority of the legislature can rush through any kind of bill without exposing it to a Referendum petition.

No Referendum on Expenditures

4. The League bill made every act of the legislature subject to the Referendum, and enabled the people to initiate laws on any subject. The government bill prohibits Referendum petitions on supply (that is, on the expenditures voted for the ensuing year), and also debars the people from initiating measures which provide for any grant or charge upon the public revenue. The people can initiate measures of general policy, but the naming of the expenditures in connection therewith, such as, for instance, salaries is left with the government. These two restrictions mean that the public purse is not to be controlled by the people. Although the legislature apparently agreed with the Premier when he stated that the people had the right to make mistakes, they are not to be given that right with their own money. They must leave that to their servants.

There is no constitutional obstacle to allowing referenda on supply. The excuse made is purely one of expediency—an excuse which will not hold water. With respect to the initiation of money expenditures, it is alleged that this interferes with certain constitutional privileges attached to the office of Lieutenant-Governor. In the first place, if this is a constitutional barrier there was no necessity for putting it in the bill—the

constitution would be sufficient of itself. In the second place, while this may be nominally a privilege of the Lieutenant-Governor, as representing the Crown, the enactment of money expenditures is the actual work of the government, who are the servants of the people. If their servants are able to get around this technicality, surely the people should be able to do the same? Surely the rights of the people can be no less than those of their representatives?

The Publicity Pamphlet

5. Reliable information for voters. The League bill makes provision for the submission of arguments by committees appointed to represent the promoters and opponents of each measure to be voted upon. The government to mail each elector sixty days before every election a pamphlet containing the text of each act to be voted upon, the arguments for and against each, and a copy of the official ballot.

Such a plan would ensure absolutely correct information being furnished every elector, giving each one opportunity to study the questions in the quiet of his own home at his leisure, away from the turmoil and confusion of party newspapers and platforms. It is one of the most valuable clauses in the League's bill, and is based on the experience of Oregon, where the plan originated. But the government demurred. Said it would cost too much. Cost! Get last year's public accounts and I guarantee you can pick out at a first glance a score of expenditures from which the people will not derive a fraction of the benefit this plan would give. One might imagine the government were afraid of the people becoming too well-informed. At the last moment a useless, one-sided clause was inserted providing that the government may make regulations for the dissemination

of literature pertaining to the matters to be voted upon. May is a very handy word, and the clause does not specify the kind of literature. At the same time, another clause in the government bill provides for the very expensive method (considering results) of advertising Referendum elections in the provincial press. Such advertising could be done much more effectively by using the pamphlet, and the saving thus made would go a long way toward paying the cost of issuing the pamphlet.

Another "Joker"

This, then, is the bill offered by the government in redemption of its pledge. Even under such handicaps it might be accepted, and the Initiative used later on to remove the objectionable features. But the government had another "safeguard" to play. A subsidiary bill was passed providing for the submission of the Direct Legislation bill to a Referendum some time this year. No objection to that, of course. It is in keeping with the principle of the bill itself. But the inevitable joker is slipped in.

Unless the majority voting in favor of the bill is at least thirty per cent. of the total electorate, the bill does not become law. It is estimated that there will be 180,000 names on the revised lists. This means that at least 54,000 affirmative votes must be cast against a less number of negative votes. At the last election the Liberals, with all their organization, press control, patronage and other resources, polled less than 33 per cent. of the total electorate. The Conservatives, with their organization, assisted by that of the Dominion government, only polled 24 per cent. Yet both sides of the House agreed on this iniquitous restriction. Neither side seems anxious to redeem its pledge, even with mutilated coin.

What do you Think?

The question to be decided, then, is

this: Shall we accept the government bill for what it is worth, endeavor to get out the 30 per cent. vote in its favor, and later try to amend it by means of the Initiative, or shall we reject the bill and devote our energies and resources to a continuance of our educational campaign for a full measure of Direct Legislation?

The Direct Legislation League will, of course, make its recommendations public at an early date. Meanwhile, what do the people think about it?

THE DEBT IDEA

"The whole question of Canadian Defence is one not of being taxed; it is one of paying a debt. . . . It is not an agreeable prospect that Canada should remain forever in leading strings and pinafores—sucking pap."

One could hardly credit this language to a thoughtful writer in our magazine press. It is to be expected on the hustings or in the fireworks of a debate. Yet a recent issue of a journal on the Pacific province carries this cant to its readers on its editorial pages.

This writer must have partaken of some of the scare-jingo-pessimism that is altogether too current in British Columbia. Strange as it may seem to an Easterner or even to a dweller on the peaceful prairies, there are serious minded men in that province who assert that the Japanese will in three years capture California and extend up the whole Western slope of the Rockies. They alarm each other by picturing this dreadful yellow possibility, and by constant repetition come to believe what at first must have been chimerical even to themselves.

If there is one thing that will defeat the ends they try to reach, it will be to try to make the Canadian public believe that Canada is an ingrate, a child in arms, spurning to aid the feeble mother.

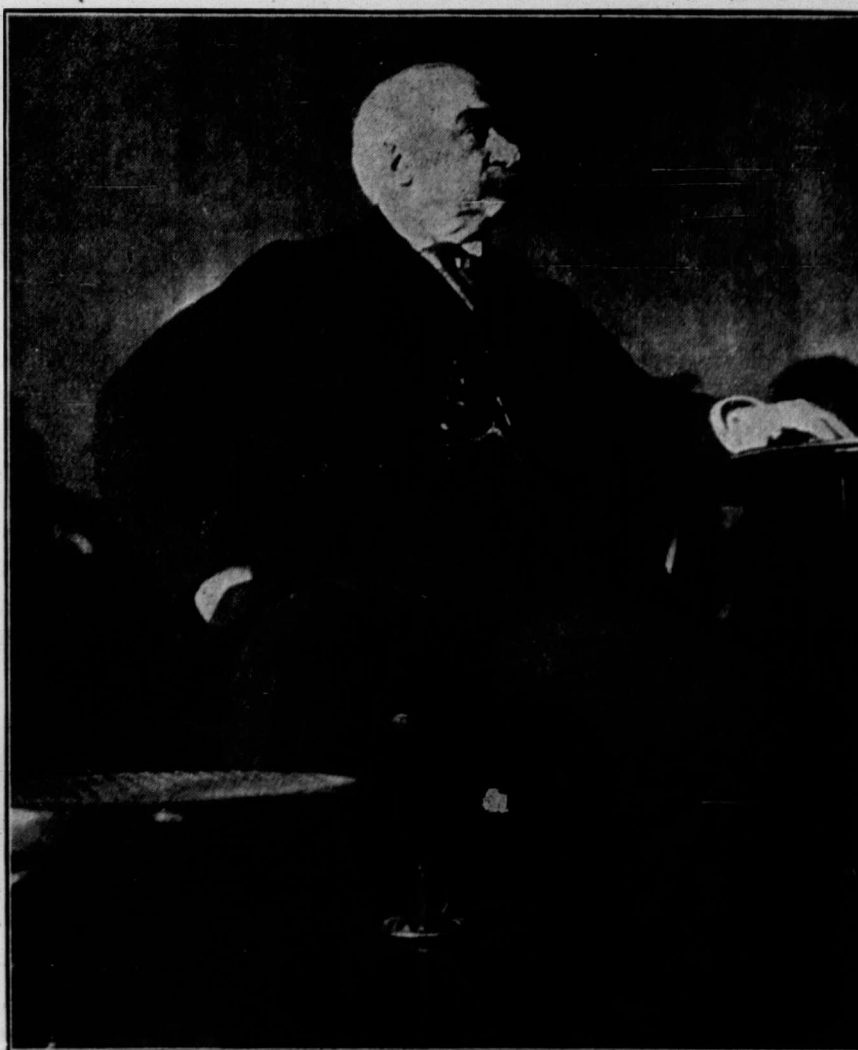
The paying-a-debt idea creates a nausea. Sane men do not give out such sentiments for serious regard to their serious readers. Canadians are the most loyal people in the world. They respect, honor and are willing to stand in the forefront of the nations' battles, but nothing good can come from some writers, speakers and politicians who picture Canadians as ingrates and Great Britain as a feeble suppliant for a wayward son. This style of language is resented by all.

If we are going to talk navy, let us do so on a reasonable basis, and approach the subject from a business standpoint. When Canada built the C.P.R. or the G.T.P. such arguments were not advanced. When great undertakings are advocated, such puerile talk does not precede them. Neither is it necessary now for such language to be given our readers. Let us be men. The greatest good that can come to the Empire, is a stalwart race of hearty men, whose ideals have been noble, lofty and healthy. If we want a weakling, puny and servile race of men in this broad Canada of ours, there is no better road to that end than by the way of these appeals. If Canada builds her navy, it must be purely a business proposition for a business reason, along business lines.—Farmers' Magazine, Toronto.

CELEBRATED FORTIETH BIRTHDAY

The Chicago Daily Farmers' and Drovers' Journal celebrated its fortieth birthday last week. This newspaper, which has gained a unique position among American agricultural journals, was founded on January 11, 1873, by Harvey L. Goodall. For some years after his death in 1900, his widow, a woman of conspicuous talent, conducted the paper. She is now ably assisted by her son, Harvey L. Goodall, the present editor, under whose direction the Daily Farmers' has enjoyed continued success.

The only way for a rich man to be healthy is, by exercise and abstinence, to live as if he were poor.—Sir W. Temple.



J. PIERPONT MORGAN

Whose Wall Street Banking House, according to his own evidence at the recent Money Trust investigation, controls over \$10,000,000,000